

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

Theme: The Influences of different belief systems on Chinese rulers

This task is based on the accompanying documents (1-6). Some of them were edited for the purposes of the task. The essay is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view.

Historical Context: In China, at least four different beliefs systems have historically influenced Chinese thinking. These belief systems are Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, and Buddhism. Some of these belief systems were developed because China was experiencing chaos within the country. Different rulers used different ideas from these belief systems to help them keep their country in order.

Task: Identify the four different belief systems revealed in the documents. Explain what a good ruler is according to each of the belief systems. Explain how a ruler might treat somebody who was caught stealing a sheep, according to each of the belief systems.

Part A- Short Answer

The documents below relate to the different belief systems in China. Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow it. These answers will help you in your Part B essay.

Document 1: A CONFUCIAN SAYING

The Master said. "Rule over them with dignity and they will be respectful; treat them with kindness and they will do their best; raise the good and instruct those who are backward and they will be filled with happiness."

-Confucius

1. List three characteristics Confucius thought a good ruler should possess.

Document 2: FROM THE BOOK OF LAO ZI, A DAOIST PHILOSOPHER

The best rulers are those that people do not even know exist.
The next best are those who people love and praise.
The next are those who people fear,
The next are those who people despise.
The best rulers seldom issue any orders.

1. What are two characteristics Lao Zi considered “best” for a ruler?

2. What was the purpose of this little speech?

Document 3: LAWS ON LAND: a time of Legalism

1. Those who occupy more land than allowed will be beaten ten strokes. More strokes can be added for each piece of extra land they are occupying. After the punishment equals sixty strokes, fewer strokes will be added for each extra piece of land they occupy. The maximum penalty is one year of hard labor. If there is plenty of land around, no punishments shall be given.

2. Those who plant public or private land they do not own may be beaten thirty strokes. If they are planting on many pieces of land they do not own, they may be beaten more than 100 strokes. The maximum penalty is one and a half years of hard labor. The crops that were grown on the land go to the owner of the land or the government.

- from the Tang Legal Code, 653 A.D.

1. What kind of document is this?

2. Discuss two of the reasons people could be punished under the laws written above.

Document #4: BUDDHISM

The Buddha said : “Should a man seek to do me harm, I will counter with compassion, calmness and joy; The more he approaches me with hate, the more I reach out with kindness. The forces of goodness will be with me, while harmful forces and repeated misfortune will be with the other.”

1. Who is this a sculpture of?

2. What mood does the sculpture capture?

3. What is one major message that the Buddha tried to spread to everyone, including rulers?

Document #5: PROCLAMATION OF THE HONGWU EMPEROR (excerpted)

To all civil and military officials:

I have told you to refrain from evil. Doing so would enable you to bring glory to your ancestors, your wives, and children, and yourselves. However, how many of you have followed my instructions? Those of you in charge of money and grain have stolen them yourselves; those of you in charge of criminal laws and punishments have ignored them. Occasionally these matters come to my attention. I punish them with the death penalty or forced labor, or have them flogged with bamboo sticks.

When a criminal commits a crime or when a good person mistakenly violates a law, he is going to be punished. In the morning I punish a few; by evening others commit the same crime. I punish these in the evening and by the next morning again there are violations. The harsher the punishment, the more the violations. Day and night I cannot rest. What a difficult situation this is! If I punish people I am considered evil. If I go lightly on them, the law becomes useless, and people think I am a useless ruler. To be a ruler is difficult indeed.

1. How does the Hongwu emperor believe he should do about crime?

2. What are some of the problems he faces using this method?

3. What was the purpose of this letter?

Document #6: EMPEROR TAIZONG ON EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

How a Ruler Should Act

When the ruler looks as lofty as a mountain peak and as pure and bright as the sun and the moon, the people will admire and respect him. He must broaden his mind to accept heaven and earth, and use his heart to make fair decisions. He cannot expand his territory without goodness; he cannot protect his people without kindness. He treats his relatives with kindness, acts politely toward his officers, honors his ancestors, and receives his subjects with thoughtfulness. Having disciplined himself, he practices good morals and righteousness. This is how a ruler should act.

1. Give three examples of how Emperor Taizong believes a ruler should act.

2. What feelings did this ruler have about his subjects?
